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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

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J. C.

DATE: March 9, 1959

SUBJECT: The Berlin Crisis

PARTICIPANTS: Paul Koht - Ambassador of Norway
Livingston T. Merchant - Assistant Secretary for
European Affairs
William M. Kerrigan - DMA

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In response to Ambassador Koht's question about developments on the Berlin crisis, Mr. Merchant informed him that talks were taking place in Paris today in order to reach agreement on two problems: (1) an agreement on the nature of the reply to be made to the most recent Soviet note, and (2) the nature of possible substantive positions for any talks we may have with the USSR. Mr. Merchant told the Ambassador that we have proposed that a Foreign Minister meeting take place, and if that goes well, to follow it with a summit meeting. The summit meeting, however, should not, in our view, have any sort of restrictive agenda. Among the problems we are wrestling with is the question of Polish and Czechoslovakian participation. We believe that in the first instance the talks ought to be confined to the four powers but we would not by any means exclude later entry of any other powers as the talks progress, and the desirability of other participants becomes apparent. Ambassador Koht inquired whether the question of parity of participation was negotiable with the USSR. Mr. Merchant responded that he believed that it was, and in any event we would not refuse to meet with the USSR on the mere question of participation of other powers.

Mr. Merchant indicated that we had in mind for the Foreign Ministers' conference time sometime early in May,

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- 2 -

perhaps around the 11th. He pointed out that during April the NATO meeting will take place and later on in April SEATO will meet, which precludes a Foreign Ministers' meeting earlier than the suggested date. Mr. Merchant informed Ambassador Koht that we hope to have some fairly well developed ideas regarding the four power meeting to present to NAC, but clearly our ideas will not be final by that time.

Generally speaking we will be developing our ideas from the basis of our Geneva proposals. We have under consideration, however, some new ideas; perhaps to suggest that we might move forward the tabling of the peace treaty with the Germans, and set back in time somewhat the question of free elections. We are still exploring the feasibility of these ideas, particularly how to devise a scheme of this sort that can be handled on a step by step basis in a generally self-enforcing fashion. Mr. Merchant observed that if the USSR is genuinely interested in reunification of Germany, free elections at the end of the road in Germany would be a prospect that the officials of the GDR must come to terms with.

Mr. Merchant observed that he believed that there were two possibilities for the status of Berlin in the near future, (1) the status quo, and (2) as capital of a genuinely united Germany. Ambassador Koht inquired whether the U.S. Government was making plans to prepare for the possible eventuality of war. Mr. Merchant responded that the President had ruled out mobilization, and we have, of course, attempted to avoid any provocative action. However, for the Ambassador's private information, we are taking certain steps to increase the state of our readiness; we believe that the USSR is aware of these steps as we have every intention they should be.

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